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FROM TRIGGER POINT TO ENTRY INTO FORCE

It is virtually certain that the Chemical Weapons Convention will be in force early next spring. Sixty-three states had deposited their instruments of ratification with the UN Secretary-General by mid-September and additional ratifications are imminent. Article XXI states that the Convention shall enter into force 180 days after deposit of the 65th ratification.

It is also sure that the United States and the Russian Federation, the two signatories with declared chemical weapons stockpiles, will not ratify in time to be among the first 65 states parties. Nevertheless, both countries remain firmly committed to the Convention and there is good reason to expect both of them to be on board when the treaty enters into force.

In the US Senate, as the Convention finally approached a vote on 12 September, there appeared to be well over the two-thirds majority needed for ratification. Then, presidential challenger and former senator Robert Dole, who had not previously declared any view regarding ratification, sent a last-minute letter to the Senate Majority Leader praising the ultimate goal of eliminating chemical weapons but setting deliberately impossible conditions. The Dole letter faced members of his party who had been counted as supporters of the Convention with the prospect of either voting against ratification or rebuffing and embarrassing their own presidential candidate and recent colleague. In this situation, the White House found it prudent to seek postponement of the vote. The treaty remains on the Senate calendar but is unlikely to be reconsidered until next year.

The outside world is familiar with the madness that sets into US politics at the time of presidential elections and has no option but to live with it as best it can. In order to bring consideration of the Convention back to reality after election fever has subsided, senior US leaders in both major political parties who understand that the treaty is in the national interest will need to accord it the high priority it merits and to speak out forcefully. In this, they can count on support from the US chemical industry, whose principal trade association, immediately after the postponement of Senate action, strongly reaffirmed its backing of the Convention. Then, when the Convention is finally put to a vote early next year, the bipartisan support that was evident during two years of Senate committee hearings will culminate in its ratification.

In the Russian Federation, President Yeltsin's government has consistently supported the Convention. Nevertheless, the Convention has not yet been presented to the

Duma, and the elimination of Russian chemical weapons is not yet underway. Among the problems delaying ratification, the principal one appears to be the high cost of safely destroying that massive stockpile. The chemical demilitarization program adopted in March by the Russian government, authorization for which is pending before the Duma, is estimated to require \$3.3 billion. The US has allocated \$68 million from its Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, and planning has begun for US-Russian collaboration to build a large demilitarization facility at Schuchye, based on the two-step Russian technology for neutralizing organophosphorus nerve agents. Other countries, among them Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, are providing financial assistance or technical collaboration. Clearly, the pace of chemical demilitarization and ratification in Russia is related to the provision of outside assistance.

In contrast to the delay in ratification by the US and Russia, it is impressive that nearly all of the world's other large chemical producers have already ratified. There are, however, several non-ratifying signatory states whose participation in the Convention is particularly important for international security. These include China, Iran and Pakistan. And there are a few important states that are not even among the 160 that have signed the Convention. For some non-signatory states in the Middle East, participation in the Convention may have to await progress in regional nuclear arms control and the Mid-East peace process. But once the Convention enters into force, as it soon will, the incentives it will create for joining and its penalties for staying out, together with the political force inherent in its large number of states parties, will help drive the Convention even closer toward the universality to which it ultimately aspires.

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